

The Builder.

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It stated in the middle of last April, when speaking of the necessity which existed for a museum illustrative of our national architecture, that Mr. Wyse was about to bring the subject before Parliament, and we urged all those who felt how valuable such a collection would be, to petition the legislature and otherwise assist the endeavour as far as they might be able.*

The attempt has since been made, and we are sorry to say has failed. Following these remarks, our readers will find a report of the proceedings in the House of Commons on the occasion, and will see that a proposal of an address to her Majesty, that she would be pleased to establish a museum of national antiquities, and appoint a commission for the conservation of national monuments, was NEGATIVE WITHOUT A DIVISION.

Mr. Wyse introduced the motion eloquently, as he always does, but we think the honourable gentleman did not display his usual tact in selecting the mode and moment in which it was brought forward. It came upon the artistic public unexpectedly; no evidence was sought, no opportunity was given for the expression of opinion upon it. Mr. Wyse feeling, and justly, that his case was a strong one, relied solely upon it, and asked no aid. He seems even to have neglected recognized evidence that was before him, and to have given up a foundation already prepared on which the new structure might have been raised. We refer to the report from Mr. Hume's Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art, appointed in 1841, which contains important evidence on the value of ancient monuments, the injuries to which they are exposed, and the necessity that exists for protection.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's objection to the general question was singularly weak. He said it should be remembered that abroad matters of this sort were the object of the care of the government, but that in England custom left them to the tender mercies of private individuals: in other words, because the English Government never had given any sort of attention to our national structures or to works of art, they never were to do so, although the result of this non-interference was seen to be most disastrous and unwise.

In France, ten years ago, M. Guizot urged to his sovereign that the history of the arts ought to occupy a place in the minds of those who regulated the social and political state of a nation,—and why is it less true here than there? "Perhaps," continued he, "no study reveals to us more clearly the social state and true spirit of past centuries than that of their monuments, religious, civil, public, and domestic:—than that of the varied ideas and laws which presided at their construction; the study, in short, of all the works, and all the varieties, of architecture, which is at once the commencement and the résumé of all the arts."

We hope that Mr. Wyse will renew his motion next session, and that in the meantime

the architectural and artistic public will express their views on the subject. Before leaving the House of Commons, we are led to mention briefly a conversation which took place there a few nights since, on the grant for repairs and other expenses connected with public buildings being proposed. Dr. Bowring wished to know if there were any hope of improving the external appearance of the National Gallery. If any proposition were made for that purpose, he was sure that all parties would cordially concur in supporting it. (Cheers.) Mr. Warburton trusted that the right hon. baronet would be prepared in the course of next year, as the cheapest mode of obtaining a good collection of pictures, to recommend the erection of a suitable building to contain the great national collection. (Hear.)

Sir R. Peel was quite willing to admit that we had thrown away the most magnificent site in Europe. No one could tell until he stood on the steps of the National Gallery what a magnificent site it possessed. He thought they would do little good, however, in now laying out money in ornamenting the exterior of that building. They might, it was true, make some improvement in the cupola, and they might make the little turrets somewhat more beautiful than at present; but still, that would not contribute to what was, after all, the main point in the construction of a gallery,—the mode of lighting the pictures. It was, no doubt, a matter of great consideration. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Hawes wished to put in one word for the modern school of painting by our own countrymen. Their works, he believed, if wisely selected, might form a collection which would compare with any gallery that had ever existed. Lord Mahon suggested the propriety of procuring a collection of portraits of eminent men distinguished in the history of this country. Such a collection might exercise a most beneficial influence upon the rising generation, whilst it could be procured probably at little expense.

It is so seldom that our legislators talk about art, as legislators, that we must not omit reference to it when they do.

MUSEUM OF NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES.

On Friday, the 27th ult., Mr. Wyse, pursuant to notice, rose to "move an address to her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give directions for the establishment and maintenance of a Museum of National Antiquities, in conjunction with a commission for the conservation of national monuments." He did not complain either of the application or results of the expenditure dedicated to the purchase of Grecian or Roman works of art; what he wanted was, the foundation and maintenance of a gallery for the preservation of those monuments and specimens, either of skill or feeling, which characterized the arts and history of this country. It was only by a juxtaposition of the monuments of art connected with the different epochs, from the earliest to the latest, that they could either duly estimate the past or produce for the future. It was a cardinal mistake to call on artists to produce historical works, without the means of cultivating their powers, and ascertaining the spirit of the age they had to represent. These means ought to be afforded in a liberal and ample manner, worthy of so great a nation. Hitherto our artists had but small means; although their enthusiasm had been great, their education had been limited. Much labour had therefore been misapplied, and a large expenditure of time and money forced upon them; and thus not only individuals but the nation had been deprived of opportunities of excellence which a little previous arrangement might have secured. There was no place provided for the reception of

British antiquities. Throughout the country a gradual dilapidation of public monuments was going on. In their architecture alone many of the finest old buildings were injured by neglect or injudicious repairs; many specimens of their best artists no longer existed; and, where they had been repaired, they had too often witnessed the destructive results of the "beautifying" of churchwardens and others who had no knowledge or feeling of art, and whose labours exhibited a spirit of vandalism existing in the midst of a Christian and civilized community. He mentioned the neglect with which many specimens of old church architecture had been treated, among them St. Saviour's Southwark, and the Cathedral of Durham; and in Ireland, Glendalough and Cashel. He quoted an extract from the essay of Mr. Petrie, on the Round Towers of Ireland, in which that gentleman states, that he was induced to undertake his researches solely from an ardent desire to rescue the antiquities of his native country from unmerited oblivion, and from a hope that, by making them generally known, some step might be put to the wanton destruction of those remains, which threatened to lead to their total annihilation. The same efforts should be made to preserve the ecclesiastical and historical monuments of the kingdom, and he was sure there was no one who would not co-operate with the government for the purpose, if the government was disposed to assist them. He adverted to the destruction that fell on the monuments and antiquities of France during the tempest of the revolution; but the nation had at last become conscious of the misfortune. Like ourselves, the people could complain of seeing their old buildings dilapidated, or injudiciously repaired. Many of the monuments of the country were disappearing from the soil, and remains of great value, in the precious metals, or in painted glass, were being transferred to the stranger. In a memoir of the Committee of arts and monuments it was stated that the Cathedral of Notre Dame, at Paris, was sadly shattered, that in very recent times some of its beautiful imagery and carvings had been broken or taken away, even the ancient inscription which recorded the date of its erection was almost effaced; and that it was made the place where the children of the neighbourhood assembled to amuse themselves, to the great injury of the fabric. To remedy these evils a provisional school was instituted for the purpose of awakening attention to the subject of ancient art; the plan became more developed, and, to the honour of France, it was not long before the Government exerted themselves in the matter. The present minister of that country took up the question zealously, and the committee of historical monuments and arts was appointed. The church of St. Martin des Champs, one of the oldest in Paris, was selected as a repository for monuments and specimens of ancient art. In consequence of the exertions of this committee a new spirit had been aroused in France for the illustration of every period of the progress of Christianity both in that country and throughout Europe; and there was a general desire among the people to give the fullest effect to the intentions of the Government. He hoped that not only would the historical remains of France be preserved from further injury by this committee, but that all Europe would be benefited by the liberality with which their museum was thrown open to every class of strangers. These exertions were not confined to France alone; similar efforts were making in Belgium and Germany. He reminded the House that for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament they were going to resort to Christian art, dealing with the poetry and history, not of the pagans, but of a Christian people. Was he not justified, then, in calling on them to imitate the example of France, and to found a museum of national art, combined with a commission for preventing the further decay and destruction of national monuments? He was confident the public would assist them, nay, that public liberality would outstrip their own. He knew more than one gentleman who would willingly present their collections to the public if the Government would make them accessible, by providing a place in which they might be deposited. These collections were of great value, as they were not acquired at auctions, but by a long life of research and

* See page 181, *ante*.